

## I think I know what I want, do you?

By Jonathon Barratt

*For Jane Arden*

**T**here is a RAT in my head. There is a RAT in your head too. In fact, there is a RAT in everyone's head. Perhaps you can feel a RAT constantly gnawing at your frontal lobe, eating your ideas, eating your very essence—telling you your dreams will never eventuate—until all that is left is a hollow shell.

*Better than death, right?*

RAT is Jane Arden's theory of the RAT-ional mind, as presented in her only work of prose, *You don't know what you want, do you?*. He is the voice of reason, of hunger, of instruction, of lust, of manipulation, of time, of greed, of survival. What RAT fears, more than anything, is death; if you were to die, RAT could no longer control you. He is what you call "me"; when you die so does he.

RAT ensures that nothing that didn't happen yesterday happens tomorrow. He keeps the clock ticking.

How can we live when all that matters is life's constant progression? We focus on the past to guide our future; we focus on the mistakes we made to ensure they never happen again; we (re)create futures in our mind to rectify these same mistakes; we remain in the past instead of



being present.

We must always remember the present, to be present.

I need to get something off my chest, to make a confession. It may seem a common one, but it is something that has moulded the thing I call *me*. I have, and always will have, depression and anxiety. The difference between my past/future self—my RAT self—and my present self as I write this is actually very simple but has taken me

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a long time to comprehend. For years I sought after the opinions of others to tell me what my problems were and how they could be resolved. Now, I decide for myself what is wrong with me.

*What about you?*

I'll give you an example. I was on anti-depressant medication for about four years. When I started to take it I was not in a good state. My psychologist and GP were in agreement that along with the techniques I was learning to help counter my symptoms the SSRI (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor) Effexor would be helpful to balance out the chemicals in my brain. In the last eight or so months I have weaned myself of the drug and no longer use it, which was a decision I made for myself and not my GP's (I would also like to point out that I did not stop taking the drugs out of a belief that they were causing me any harm, and I have always appreciated the advice and guidance of my psychologist and GP).

When I have discussed this with people—I have decided to be as open as possible about the subject—the reaction from them has not so much been divisive but has followed a pattern.

Most believe that I stopped taking the drug because I no longer need it. That is not the case. I stopped taking it because I felt empty. An emptiness that was different from the feelings that depression and anxiety had caused. An emotional emptiness. A RAT.

I have always been an emotional person, and I used to think it was a curse. I worked in kitchens from a young age, in a hierarchical system that expected me to belittle those beneath my assigned station, and to be disrespected by those above me. It was beyond damaging to my sense of identity. Although coming out as gay helped, it was not my sexuality that was an issue, it was my emotions. When I am angry, frustrated or overwhelmed I (generally) become upset and cry, and this is a sign of weakness in any system that thrives on power. I had to learn to control my emotions, which was why my depression and anxiety thrived, because it was hidden.

Now I feel I am a much calmer person. I have come to terms with what is happening inside my head and am aware of how I feel in the present, instead of trying to change how I feel to become “normal.” Most importantly, I feel that I have finally decided to tackle my mental health in a way that can help me become a better person for the

long term, instead of dealing with issues as they arise and only offering short term solutions. A constant recognition of my present state of mind forces RAT to scurry and hide.

Arden states: “all RATS are masculine” and “hate feminine”; it does not matter what body you inhabit. Why? Arden suggests that it is because “Feminine = surrendering. Surrendering means letting go control”. If “letting go control” means showing emotion, and showing how you feel, I would rather do so than be manipulated.

RAT aims to control your thoughts. If you let him, you will never speak for yourself. All you will ever be is a ventriloquist’s dummy. A plaything. Dead inside.

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